

Floor Discussion

David Montgomery
Bureau of the Census

The first paper, presented by Mauro S. dos Santos Cabral of the IBGE Foundation Brazil, discussed the need to have producers of information and the consumers of information to have a standard and integrated way of locating and distributing information. A proposal, to organize the data into Referential Directories (composed of statistical Metadata), create referential systems, and to 'link' various public organizations, was offered as a way for consumers of information to find the data they need and for producers to disseminate information efficiently.

The second paper, presented by Frederick R. Broome of the Bureau of the Census, discussed what the Geospatial Metadata Standards consisted of, how they relate to the Cultural and Demographic Metadata Standards. There are areas of importance to the Cultural and Demographic Metadata Standards which are not wholly addressed in the Geospatial Metadata Standards which, therefore need to be accounted for in the Geospatial Standard.

The final paper of this session was presented by William P. LaPlant, Jr. of the Bureau of the Census. The presentation consisted of a discussion of what information would be necessary for the Statistical Metadata Standard, and the various goals for the standard. This Statistical Metadata Standard will incorporate other Metadata standards such as the Cultural and Demographic Metadata Standard and the Geospatial Metadata Standard.

Pat Doyle, of the Agency for Health Care Policy and Research, opened the floor discussion with a concern that the Metadata standard cannot capture truly complex data collection instruments and post data collection processes. William LaPlant replied that despite the inclusiveness of the standard, there will be a need for the 'Contact' entries of the Metadata standard to be filled. This would provide a reference person/area which could be contacted, in order to obtain information that could not be adequately provided for in the Metadata itself. Marty Appel commented, that at the Census Bureau there will not be an attempt to instruct or insist on program areas to document in a certain manner. But rather, there will be an effort made to have the Metadata standard 'reference' the documentation of complex operations, and thereby leaving the structure of the documentation up to the individual program areas.

Wouter J. Keller, of Statistics Netherlands, commented with some strategic implementation advice which suggested that Metadata must be seen as a 'need' by the customers and Metadata must be 'linked' to the various collection tools and processes, otherwise the Metadata concept is doomed. William LaPlant responded in agreement to Mr. Keller's assessment, and further replied that at the Census Bureau there are already plans being made to have the Metadata 'ride' along with the collection tools and processes. The Metadata connection would make the jobs of subject matter experts, analysts, and statistician much easier, and therefore, provide an incentive to include and use Metadata in their various systems.

Michael J. Colledge, of the Australian Bureau of Statistics, began by commenting that 'tools' should be developed, instead of 'rules', in order for the Metadata standards to be used.

Mr. Colledge also asked the Census Bureau's panel members as to which surveys or group of surveys that they expected the Metadata standards to cover. Mr. LaPlant commented that Metadata is appropriate for all surveys to use. Mr. Appel further mentioned that as a minimum, the Metadata database for a survey could simply contain an abstract, or series of abstracts, for the key operations and a list of contact people for clarification of issues. However, there is also a certain minimum set of metadata required by an executive order for U.S. Federal agencies.